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New Great Debate?

Is the United States winning or losing ground in competition with the Communist world?

Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic presidential candidate, put that question to the Eisenhower Administration forcefully and eloquently in his speech to the nation's newspaper editors Saturday in Washington. His charge that present U. S. foreign policy is "rigid, unimaginative and fails to take advantage of new opportunities" led President Eisenhower to make an impromptu rebuttal later in the day.

How sound is the Stevenson challenge? A round-the-world survey on U. S. foreign policy by The New York Times among its correspondents substantiates the Stevenson proposition as follows: (1) The United States has been slow and ineffective in reacting to the smiling subversion of the Communists and has placed too much emphasis on military solutions and not enough on political, economic and social solutions to present world problems; (2) U. S. foreign economic policy has not kept pace with the policy of military solidarity, and the U. S. has been urging on its allies trade and political-union theories which it is not prepared to adopt itself; (3) the U. S. has been the prisoner of its own domestic political slogans in the presidential election campaigns of 1952 and of "cold war" slogans of "liberation" and "massive retaliation"; (4) leaders of the free world coalition have no effective plan for waging the more subtle second phase of the "cold war" and are inflexible and inexperienced moralizers who preach against the old pragmatic diplomacy of the past but have nothing practical to put in its place.

These are harsh criticisms of the Eisenhower-Dulles leadership, but each point has considerable validity and foreign policy therefore may become another Great Debate this year.

On the face of it, a beaming pair of Soviet good will ambassadors invited to tea with Queen Elizabeth in London constitutes a far graver threat to the free world coalition than a muscle-bound psychopathic Stalin dreaming up new purges in the Kremlin. The new Russian peace and harmony line already has (1) melted much of the cement in the NATO defense wall; (2) leap-frogged over the free world's military alliances in the Middle East to establish a Russo-Egypt Axis; (3) added new converts to the neutralist leadership of India, Burma and Indonesia (Ceylon, Iceland); and (4) convinced many of the uncommitted peoples of the world that the U. S. is more likely to start a war than Russia.

At the same time Allan Dulles, head of CIA, reminds us that while industrial parity with the United States is not within reach of the Soviets, the Russians nevertheless now (1) exceed the U. S. in the production of machine tools; (2) are training more technicians than the U. S. and will "attain an imposing advantage in number of scientists and engineers in a few years' time" and (3) have shown "high competence in the field of nuclear development both for military and peaceful purposes."

What kind of U. S. foreign policy can best offset this enhanced challenge from Moscow? The President himself, in his ASNE address, suggested long-term commitments for foreign economic aid (aimed at specific development projects) and use of the United Nations whenever possible to prevent aggression.

Mr. Stevenson urged de-emphasis of our "over-militarization of international thought" and a move to "rally the nations for a world-wide war against want." He urged abandonment of our H-bomb tests in the Pacific and channeling of economic aid through the United Nations to dissociate it from military pacts.

James Reston notes in The New York Times that the job of being "policeman, banker and baby-sitter to a restless and changing world, when the coalescing force of fear has been largely removed, is a tough assignment." Two of the top presidential contenders reflected the agony of foreign policy decisions under those conditions last Saturday in Washington.